



The Nova Scotia College of Nursing (NSCN) is the regulatory body for licensed practical nurses (LPNs), registered nurses (RNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) in Nova Scotia. Our mandate is to protect the public by promoting the provision of safe, competent, ethical and compassionate nursing services by its registrants. The term nurse in this document refers to LPNs, NPs, and RNs unless otherwise stated.

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Our practice support tools are developed using current reference material. The source of this material is available upon request.



Introduction

This tool is a resource for nurses to help them understand their scope of practice related to:

- Pronouncing death
- Certifying death

Like all practice tools, use this document in conjunction with the standards of practice and code of ethics for LPNs, RNs and NPs.

Pronouncing Death

[Pronouncing death](#) is the process of determining that vital signs have ceased, and a client has died.

In Nova Scotia, there is no requirement that indicates only specific health care professionals may pronounce a client's death.

Pronouncing death is within the scope of practice of all nurses in Nova Scotia. Nurses with the necessary knowledge, skill and judgment to assess cessation of vital signs may pronounce death.

Nurses must follow their organizational policies or processes regarding pronouncing death in their workplace.

When death is unexpected, the nurse should collaborate with other members of the health care team, including the most responsible practitioner, either a nurse practitioner (NP) or physician, to determine next steps. Next steps would include informing medical examiner and determining if body can be moved.

Certifying Death

[Certifying death](#) is the process where the Medical Certificate of Death (MCD) is completed and signed.

NPs and physicians are the only health practitioners who are able to certify death. NPs are authorized to certify death when they have the required education and within the appropriate context.

Determining the Appropriate Circumstance

NPs may certify death if they are the health care provider responsible for the treatment and care of the client and if the client's death is expected as the result of a diagnosed chronic or acute illness or condition.

NPs are not authorized to certify death and must notify the Medical Examiner immediately where there is reason to believe that the death is a result of any of the circumstances listed in sections 9-12 of the [Nova Scotia Fatality Investigations Act](#).

Having the Required Education

NPs who graduated from an NP program that did not include information about certifying death must complete postgraduate MCD education through [Dalhousie University School of Nursing](#) to do so. Once the required education is complete, NPs are issued a registration number from Vital Statistics. NPs cannot legally complete a MCD without a registration number.

Key Points to Remember

- It is within the scope of practice of all nurses to pronounce death.
- Nurses should follow their organizational policies to pronounce death.
- NPs who have completed the required education are authorized to certify death in appropriate contexts. Physicians may certify death in all contexts
- NPs with the necessary knowledge, skill and judgement, may certify death when the death is expected
- **NPs are not authorized to certify death in any circumstance within section 9-12 listed in the NS Fatality Investigations Act.**

For further information on anything contained within this practice guideline, please contact a NSCN Practice Consultant at practice@nscn.ca.